



Bald Eagles Play Out Dramatic Struggle on Ogden Bay

By Tom Wharton
THE SALT LAKE TRIBUNE

OGDEN BAY — Perched high on the branches of dead cottonwood trees, a pair of bald eagles

How to Get There

To reach the south end of Ogden Bay take the Interstate 15 exit at Roy, then work west eight miles on 5600 South to the intersection, continue west on 5500 south. Turn right on 7500 West, follow the road.

To reach the north end of the bay take the 12th Street exit of I-15 and head west 7½ miles, turn left on 7500 West. Road will dead end at area.

The gate to the south parking area near refuge headquarters closes at 5 p.m. and is only open weekdays.

Remember to take binoculars and be prepared to walk.

Survey the snow and ice covered marshes of the Great Salt Lake here, watching for signs of weakness.

A red fox sneaks through the reeds, but the birds pay little attention.

A ringneck pheasant explodes out the brush and their heads turn toward the flutter of feathers, recognizing a missed opportunity. Waves of starlings over-head mean nothing.

In the nearby Weber River, which spills into the lake, a mallard with a broken wing struggles to fly. It won't last long.

For here on the western end of Ogden Bay it is not the eagles who dare, but the small animals and birds who share the same turf during winter.

Each year bald eagles fly from just south of the Arctic Circle to dine on rabbits, ducks, pheasants and small mammals in the Great Basin. The eagles also gorge themselves on carp when ponds around the Great Salt Lake begin to thaw in early March.

Division of Wildlife Resources' biologist Don Paul has participated in the National Wildlife Federation's annual mid-winter bald eagle survey

A YEAR WITH THE



JAN. LEVEL: 4201.8 ABOVE SEA LEVEL +2.4" OVER DEC.

since 1980.

Driving and walking along the man-made dikes, he counts birds, reports prey availability and looks at winter vegetation.

Once compiled, the information is sent to the Raptor Research and Technical Assistance Center at Boise State University in Idaho.

There, biologists gather information from all over North America. By putting together long-range data, they learn more

about eagle populations, prey bases and trends.

Even experts like Paul can't pinpoint the exact number of eagles that winter on the Great Salt Lake. That's because these birds reside where they can find food.

"I've counted up to 130 birds at Ogden Bay and seen in excess of 200 birds at Salt Creek," said the veteran biologist. "It's all driven by food."

On this day, driving a route along the Weber River and

around Ogden Bay, Paul counts 19 bald eagles.

To hikers who walk the 10 miles of man-made dikes near the south entrance of Ogden Bay, the winter environment around the lake seems harsh. Many of the freshwater marshes freeze. Great expanses of ice turn the lush wetlands into what appear to be frozen wastelands.

Fog comes in off the lake and plays tricks with visibility. At times it's difficult even to spot the majestic eagles, which can stand almost three feet tall, weigh between eight and 13 pounds and possess a wing span of almost seven feet.

Wary of people, the birds seem to scan both the skies, roads and marshes in search of both prey or potential enemies.

As hundreds of thousands of Wasatch Front residents drive to work on the freeway a dozen miles to the east, eagles, rabbits, ducks and pheasants act out a daily life-and-death drama in a struggle for survival along the Great Salt Lake.

Bald Eagle Day Helps Utahns See Big Birds

More than 5,000 Utah naturalists are expected to be at six different sites throughout the state Saturday as the Division of Wildlife Resources holds its annual Bald Eagle Day.

The Beehive State's population of more than 1,200 wintering bald eagles is one of the largest in the nation and the event was organized to allow residents to get a close-up view of the majestic birds.

Division of Wildlife Resources biologists and volunteers will be on hand at the six sites with scopes, binoculars, free posters, lapel buttons and pamphlets to help people enjoy seeing the birds.

Wildlife posters feature non-game species of Utah, elk and bald eagles. Free pamphlets on bird feeding and backyard landscaping will also be offered. Utah wildlife hats will be for sale on site. Otherwise, the entire event is open and free to the public.

The sites include:

- Public Shooting Grounds state waterfowl management area west of Corrine on State Road 83.
- Salt Lake City west of Cudahy Lane and the Jordan River.
- Ophir Canyon south of Tooele.
- The Green River between Jensen and Dinosaur national monuments.
- Quichipa Lake west of Cedar City.
- Gordon Creek west of Price.

According to Division of Wildlife Resources' special projects manager Bob Walters, Bald Eagle Day offers an excellent opportunity to study the bald eagle in its Utah winter habitat.

He says eagle watchers should bring binoculars, dress warmly and wear insulated waterproof boots. Observation sites will be set up where the largest concentrations of eagles have been found this year.

Sometimes, bald eagle observers get to see something extra. At one northern Utah site a few years ago, a red fox took turns working on the remains of a deer. The fox shared the feast with three bald eagles, all within sight of a spotting scope set up on the site.

Volunteers and bird experts who wish to help with the event are needed.

They can contact Walters at 538-4757 or call the nongame or information manager at wildlife resources' offices in Price, Vernal, Cedar City, Springville or Ogden.

Sheeprock Mountains Challenge Four-Wheelers

By Craig Hansell
THE SALT LAKE TRIBUNE

VERNON, Tooele County — The area around this small town in the southeast end of Tooele County has excellent roads for four-wheel drive exploration. Now, when temperatures are below freezing and the roads are solid, is a good time to visit the Sheeprock Mountains.

This range south of Lookout Pass, the Onaqui and Stansbury Mountains, has peaks rising to an elevation of 9,154 feet. As of Jan. 20, the higher north-facing canyons were filled with enough snow that motor-powered exploration ended inside the canyon just above the foothills. Human Rights Day was a blue-bird day here and it offered excellent opportunities to practice extracting a four-wheeler mired in the snow.

Those same temperature gradients snow crystals that plague avalanche forecasters at ski resorts, don't provide very good traction for your four-wheel drive either. The loose snow has very little water content and without special tires and/or chains, uphill travel was limited.

Travel in the flat and into the foothills above Rush Valley was good but in the north-facing can-

yons the snow became deep enough to preclude progress.

The smog-free vista of Rush Valley and the mountains beyond was well worth the trip.

Head south of Salt Lake on I-15, take the Bluffdale exit and head west to Redwood Road (Utah Highway 68) where you turn south. Turn right (west) on Utah Highway 73 through Cedar Fort and Fairfield. Take the Pony Express route over Look Out Pass to explore the west side of the range.

From Vernon on, four-wheel drive is handy. Although the Sheeprocks are listed on maps as being part of the Wasatch National Forest, the mountains are administered by the Uinta National Forest. Assistant Nephil Ranger Mark Sensibaugh cautions visitors to tread lightly and make sure the ground is frozen enough, or dry, so vehicles don't leave big ruts as evidence of their passing.

Sensibaugh said there was mineral exploration for iron, gold and silver on the Sheeprocks. "The private land high on the mountains is patented mining claims," Sensibaugh said. "If people start doing resource damage [tearing up roads] they should stop [and not drive any further]."

Get a copy of the BLM's Rush Valley and Lynndyl surface map. See C-7, Column 1



Craig Hansell/The Salt Lake Tribune
This stand of trees, in the southwest corner of Rush Valley, is a popular spot for visitors to see bald eagles. It is one attraction for people traveling south in the valley to the Sheeprock Mountains.

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